



The Clifton Institute

Novel Coronavirus Update

After consideration of the health of our community, we have cancelled all of our in-person events until further notice. We really miss having visitors to the field station and we can't wait for the day when we can resume normal operations. We are offering some of our scheduled programs online (see below). We are also offering [open-access days](#) for Friends of the Clifton Institute every Saturday from 10 AM until 4 PM to give people the opportunity to get outdoor activity while complying with Governor Northam's latest Executive Order. You can become a Friend of the Clifton Institute with annual donation of \$40 or more by donating [here](#).

While our programs have been cancelled we have had more time than usual to work on our trail network: we have started building two new trails that will create a 4.5 mile loop in conjunction with our existing trails. We also painted blazes on the Oak Spring, Springhouse, and Adams Loop trails and we will be blazing other trails and adding trail

signs in the coming months. Our trail map can be found [here](#). It's easier than ever to explore our trails during open-access days!

Follow us on [Facebook](#) for videos, stories, and updates from the field station. We hope to see you out here (at a distance) soon and we hope you all are well!

News



Local Grassland Conserved

Powerline clearings may not sound like great habitat, but they can actually serve as important refuges for native prairie plants because they are disturbed frequently. A powerline clearing on private land along Raccoon Ford Road in Culpeper County has the additional advantage of being on clay hardpan soil that favors grasses and flowers over woody vegetation. The plant community there is an excellent example of a Piedmont prairie, with species like Grass-leaf Blazing Star (see photo), Forked Blue Curls, Whorled Rosinweed, and Rose-pink.



When we learned about this site, we got in touch with the landowners to see if we could include it in the plant surveys of prairie remnants we will be conducting this summer. They graciously agreed and subsequently asked for our advice about planting a disturbed area. Dominion Energy is replacing the power poles in the right-of-way (you can see the boardwalk they put down to minimize disturbance from their vehicles and equipment in the photo). One of Dominion's contractors proposed planting Switchgrass to help re-vegetate the site after the work was complete. Switchgrass is native, but it is a very aggressive grass that would outcompete many of the special plants of the site. We worked with the landowners and a Dominion biologist to come up with a plan, and Dominion has agreed not to plant anything! The next step will be to monitor the area to make sure natural regeneration occurs without invasion of non-native plants. We are grateful for Dominion

Energy's cooperation and that so many people are working to help native plants.



Piedmont Prairie Plants for Sale

Last fall, Executive Director Bert Harris collected seeds of 38 native grassland plant species from native grasslands around the area. We planted over 1,000 seeds that have grown into seedlings that we will use in our restoration projects. Thank you to the many volunteers who helped clean and sow seeds, staff at the Piedmont Environmental Council greenhouse who have housed and watered seedlings, and Hill House Nursery and Earth Sangha who provided advice and donated materials for this project.



We have at least 400 extra plants of 16 species that are for sale. Prices and inventory are [here](#). All of the seedlings are of local ecotypes and one species, Torrey's Mountain-mint, is not usually available commercially. Other nice species that are underrepresented in gardens that we're selling include Maryland Golden-aster (see photo), Scaly Blazing Star, Green Milkweed, Elliot's Bluestem, and Purple Three-awn Grass. We have some classics as well, such as Butterfly Milkweed and Wild Bergamot. We have plants that are suited to a variety of sun and moisture conditions.

If you are interested in buying plants please email Bert at bharris@cliftoninstitute.org. We will accept payment via PayPal. We are taking every possible precaution in selling the plants. Pots will be sanitized before sale. After a sale, Bert will arrange with you to leave your seedlings at our lower parking area (The Gap) for pickup. Pickups will be scheduled so that no more than one person is picking up plants at a time.



March Wildlife Sightings: The Reckless Exuberance of Spring

Spring has sprung! The month started with arrivals of short-distance migrants like Tree Swallows and Pine Warblers. We are also now getting tropical species like Louisiana Waterthrushes and Purple Martins. The ducks have mostly moved out but there are still a lot of other winter species around like juncos and Winter Wrens. A neat thing about this time of year is that these species that hunker down in the winter are now singing away in preparation for breeding further north. If you haven't heard the song of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, listen [here](#) and then see if you can hear one outside your house. They are passing through our area now and Aldo Leopold considered them to be a sign of spring's "reckless exuberance."



Twelve Black Rat Snakes have emerged from their hibernaculum under one of our culverts and they are sunning themselves in bushes on warm days. Bloodroots (pictured here), Rue Anemones, and Spring Beauties are all blooming and Trout Lilies and Marsh Marigolds will soon follow. Come out on an Open Access day and enjoy some of these species!



There has also been a lot of activity on our ponds. We have camera trap footage from March 10th of what appears to be a beaver chasing a river otter off its lodge. At 7:43am an otter appears (top of image), then becomes a blur of movement as a beaver follows it. Beaver-otter interactions are often characterized as commensal, with otters benefiting from the habitat beavers create, and beavers neither harmed nor helped by otters. In fact, their behaviors toward one another may vary quite a bit, depending on factors such as otter food availability, time of year, presence of beaver kits, and more. Otters may even opportunistically prey upon beavers if fish are scarce!

The same camera trap also recently recorded evidence of a muskrat appearing to help maintain the beaver lodge by



moving branches and mud around its exterior. While we know that muskrats use existing beaver lodges, we were surprised to learn that they might be working on lodge upkeep. The more we learn about the interactions between these critters, the harder it is not to let our imaginations run wild with images of what goes on at a beaver lodge in the middle of the night!



Summer camp registration is open!

This year we are running four sessions of summer camp and there is something for every age between 4 and 18. You can learn more and register on [our calendar](#). We hope we'll see you out here this summer!

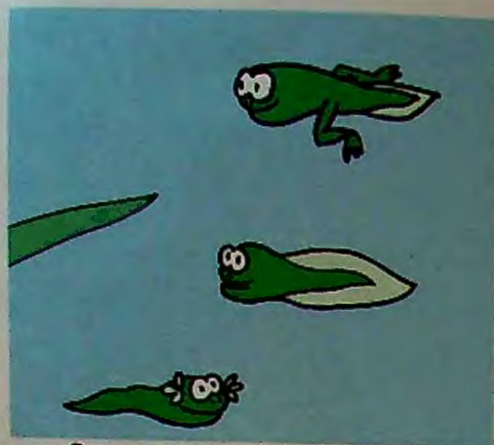
Upcoming Events

RSVP by clicking the links below or by emailing Alison at azak@cliftoninstitute.org.

Piedmont Polliwogs: Animal Yoga

Thursday, April 2, 10:30 AM

Ms. Alison is leading a kids animal yoga class
LIVE on Facebook. Don't miss it!



Piedmont Polliwogs

Haiku Contest

National Poetry Month Haiku Contest

April is National Poetry Month and we're celebrating with a haiku contest! We invite you to submit up to five, original haiku that highlights your personal relationship with nature in Virginia. Our definition of haiku is quite broad. Don't worry about counting syllables, just capture an experience in three, short lines. To submit, email your entry to azak@cliftoninstitute.org by April 27th. The winners will be announced on April 30th. Winning poems will be shared on our social media pages.

International Beaver Day: Presentation and Pond Sit

Tuesday, April 7, 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM

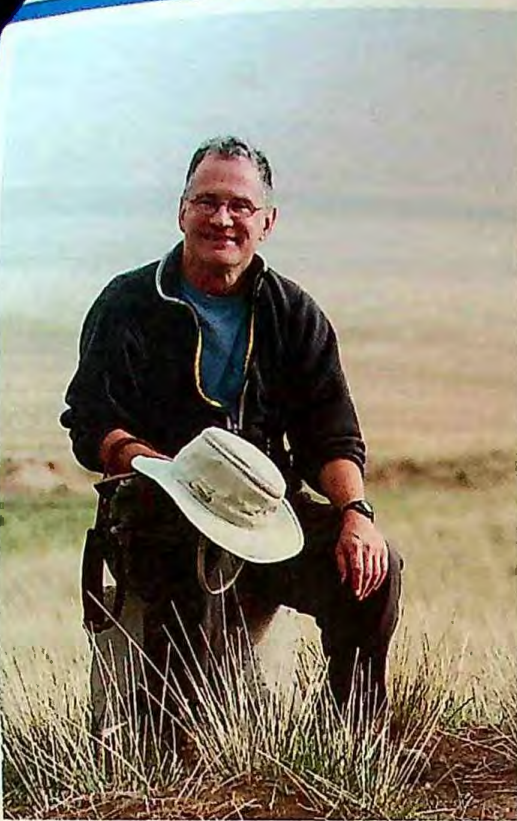
Join us in celebrating International Beaver Day! Alison will give a live, online presentation on the challenges and benefits to coexisting with beavers. Please register if you would like to watch live so we can communicate and share links via email. The presentation will be recorded if you are interested but can't tune in live. Photo by Amy Johnson.



Virtual Book Club: No Way Home by David Wilcove

Friday, April 10, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

No Way Home: The Decline of the World's Great Animal Migrations by David Wilcove exposes readers to the wonders and perils of animal movement across the landscape. Although we have had to cancel the in-person version of this event, we have multiple online options for participation, including a Facebook [discussion group](#) and a live online meeting at the original time. If you are interested in participating live, please register so we have your email address. Finally, Alison will be interviewing author David Wilcove and then sharing the recording with the group, so please email any questions for the author to azak@cliftoninstitute.org. **Dr. Wilcove** is a professor of ecology, evolutionary biology, and public affairs at Princeton University. The primary question driving his research is "How do we find room for biodiversity in an increasingly hot, hungry, and crowded world?" He is the also the author of *The Condor's Shadow: The Loss and Recovery of Wildlife in America* (1999).



Virtual Warbler Song Bootcamp

Friday, April 24, 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM

This program will now be available online. Please register if you would like to watch live so we can communicate and share links via email. We will listen to the songs of each of the migratory warblers that pass through our region in spring, while looking at spectrograms to help visual learners identify differences in similar songs. We will also briefly discuss habitats where breeding warblers can be found in our area and cover a handful of other migrants such as vireos and thrushes. This workshop will be of interest to birdwatchers of all skill levels. It will definitely be more fun than listening to a warbler song CD in your car! Photo by Cameron Darnell.



The Clifton Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located on a 900-acre field station just north of Warrenton, VA. We provide environmental education, conduct ecological research, and restore habitat for native plants and animals. All donations are fully tax-deductible.